

NOTEBOOKS

FAQ

Q Does a typical notebook battery last long enough to watch a DVD film?

A Watching a DVD on your notebook is certainly an attractive idea, particularly on a long train journey or a flight. Most notebook batteries last at least half as long playing a DVD as they do on our light-usage battery benchmark, due to the extra power requirements of keeping the optical drive spinning. If you want to watch a two-hour movie on your notebook, for example, look for one with a battery life of four hours or more.

Unfortunately, many notebook batteries have a shorter life. To maximise use, you can try reducing the screen's brightness. If you're watching home movies you can copy the video files to your hard disk. This technique is illegal for commercial content, though. If you're serious about watching films on the move a second notebook battery or dedicated portable DVD player are the best choices.

Seth Barton

Notebooks and video expert

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TOSHIBA Satellite Pro A120SE-163

★★★★★

£559 inc VAT

There are many models in Toshiba's A120 range. We looked at the A120 chassis in *What's New: Notebooks, Shopper* November 2006, and were impressed. A number of clever design features give it a good chance of surviving common mishaps. For example, the motherboard is shaped to keep delicate components away from the vulnerable corners.

The keyboard is spill resistant and comfortable to type on, with good depth of travel and a positive action. Some of the keys are a little on the small side, however, so those with big fingers may have problems. The touch pad has big buttons with a uniform response across their width. It's unusually sensitive, but you quickly get used to it.

The display has an anti-glare coating, rather than the increasingly popular gloss type. This makes it easier to read in bright lighting conditions, but colours look a little muted and there's a mild graininess to it. It's capable of a bright white, though there is a touch of blue in it. It's a decent display, but more suited to office applications than photo or video work. The speakers are better than the usual notebook fare, with bright and clear audio. There's a dedicated volume control on the front edge of the chassis, so you won't have to scrabble for keyboard short cuts during a presentation.

There is a wide range of specifications available in the A120 chassis. This model has a dual-core processor and 512MB of RAM, so it performed well in our benchmarks, and will easily take on day-to-day tasks such as web surfing and office applications. For tougher tasks, you may want to spend £35 on an extra 512MB of RAM to put in the easily accessible free memory slot.



This notebook comes with Windows XP Professional Edition, which has useful features not found in XP Home, such as Remote Desktop access and the ability to join a corporate domain. Battery life was 226 minutes, which is plenty for occasional mobile use.

For storage, there's a DVD writer and a 60GB disk. It's big enough for most uses but will fill quickly if you hoard media files. It also has shock protection, which

should save your data in the event of an accident. A memory card reader is included, but it has slots for SD and MMC cards only. There are three USB ports, but they are all inconveniently mounted on the rear of the chassis.

This notebook is ideal if you want a tough computer with Windows XP Professional Edition. However, many users will be better served by the Asus F3F-AP010H (see our 'Also consider...' below). It costs more, but has a bigger hard disk, more RAM, a brighter, glossier screen and better battery life.

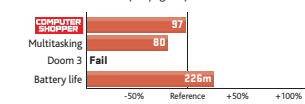
Seth Barton

SUMMARY

- ✓ Designed to survive accidents
- ✓ Good keyboard and touch pad
- ✗ Needs more RAM

NOTEBOOK 1.6GHz Intel Core Duo T2050, 512MB RAM, 60GB hard disk, Intel GMA 950 graphics, DVD+/-RW +/-DL drive, 15.4in LCD screen, 2.8kg
PART CODE PSAC1E-04V00VEN
SUPPLIER Laptops Direct 08701 670818
DETAILS www.toshiba.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 56)



Also consider...

ASUS F3F-AP010H

★★★★★

£592 inc VAT



The F3F looks much more stylish than you'd expect at this price, sharing a chassis with more expensive Asus notebooks. The display is excellent, and is capable of producing bright whites and subtle colours. Input devices are generally good, with a firm keyboard and accurate touch pad, although the unusual tilting touch pad button is a little indistinct when pressed.

This notebook has all the ports you'll need, including a memory card reader. Inside there's a decent-sized 80GB hard disk plus a DVD writer for backups. It can handle all but the toughest tasks thanks to a dual-core processor and 1GB of RAM, and scored 118 overall in our application benchmarks. The battery is incredible, lasting for just over six hours in our light-usage test.

NOTEBOOK 1.6GHz Intel Core Duo T2050 processor, 1GB RAM, 80GB hard disk, Intel GMA 950 integrated graphics, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 15.4in widescreen LCD SUPPLIER Scan 08707 554747 DETAILS <http://uk.asus.com> PART CODE F3F-AP010H ✓ Great display; long battery life and warranty ✗ Poor touch pad button FULL REVIEW Jan 2007



The F3F is a great notebook with a confidence-inspiring two-year warranty. It won the £600 category in our Notebook Price Test (*Shopper* January 2007).

FUJITSU SIEMENS Amilo Pa1510

★★

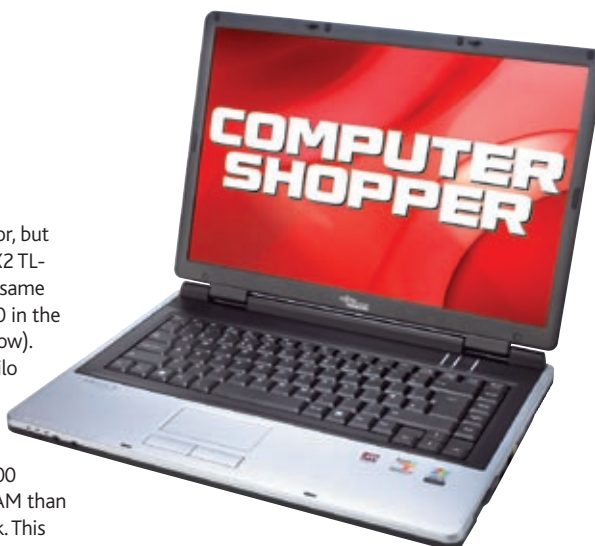
£599 inc VAT

Most notebooks we review use an Intel processor, but Fujitsu Siemens' Amilo uses an AMD Turion 64 X2 TL-50. It's a dual-core processor, which runs at the same 1.6GHz clock speed as the Intel Core Duo T2050 in the Asus F3F-AP010H (see our 'Also consider...' below). Despite its similarly specified processor, the Amilo Pa1510 wasn't as quick in our benchmarks. It scored 147 in our video-encoding test, seven points behind the Asus F3F.

This notebook has an ATI Radeon Xpress 1100 graphics chipset, which uses up more system RAM than the Intel GMA 950 chipset in the Asus notebook. This leaves less RAM for such memory-hungry tasks as our image-editing benchmark. The Amilo managed a respectable 103, but the F3F-AP010H was far quicker with a score of 121. The AMD processor has the same 31W power requirement as the Intel, but the Amilo lasted only one hour and 51 minutes in our light-usage battery test, less than a third as long as the Asus notebook and almost two hours less than the Toshiba A120, reviewed left.

Other than its disappointing benchmark performance, the Pa1510 is a decent notebook. There are lots of ports around the edges of the chassis including three USB and one FireWire port, and a memory card reader with support for SD, MMC and MS formats. Though the base gets warm in use, there are no particularly hot spots. The keyboard is a little unresponsive, but the keys have plenty of travel and they are all a good size. The touch pad responds accurately.

Inside there's a big 120GB hard disk. Fujitsu Siemens ships this notebook with Windows XP Media



Center Edition. This means you can easily browse all your media files from one simple interface. If you feel like watching TV, you can add a TV tuner and use the operating system's excellent electronic programme guide. Kworld's DVB-T 310U USB hybrid tuner comes with compatible drivers, and is available for less than £40.

This notebook's display is its best feature. It's widescreen, and has a gloss coating that improves the appearance of darker shades and makes colours vivid. It's not the brightest display we've seen, but gives a consistent white across the whole screen. The speakers are typical for a notebook, sounding tinny and not very loud, so you'll need an external set to enjoy music or movies.

This isn't a bad notebook for day-to-day computing and home entertainment, but it is outclassed by several competitors. If you want a Media Center notebook, Acer's Aspire 5612WLMi, reviewed in our 2007 Notebook Price Test (Labs, Shopper January 2007), is a better choice.

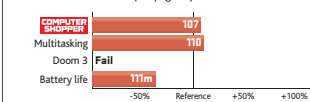
Seth Barton

SUMMARY

- ✓ Windows XP Media Center Edition
- ✗ RAM-guzzling graphics chipset
- ✗ Slow application performance

NOTEBOOK 1.6GHz AMD Turion 64 X2 TL-50, 1GB RAM, 120GB hard disk, ATI Radeon Xpress 1100 graphics, DVD+/-RW +/-DL drive, 15.4in LCD screen, 2.8kg
PART CODE 82716303
SUPPLIER www.johnlewis.com
DETAILS www.fujitsu-siemens.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 56)



PC NEXTDAY Zoostorm 55-7701

★★★★★

£919 inc VAT and delivery



PC Nextday's 55-7701 is a desktop replacement notebook with a big 17in display that supports a 1,440x900 pixel resolution. This provides plenty of desktop space for complicated or multiple applications. The keyboard isn't the best we've used, so those who type long documents should look elsewhere. The touch pad is accurate, but most users will opt for a mouse with this kind of notebook. Inside there's a big 120GB hard disk, which provides lots of storage for large media files.

The Intel Core 2 Duo processor and 1GB of RAM helped the Zoostorm to a fantastic 170 in the Shopper application benchmarks. With a dedicated 3D graphics chipset, it managed a playable 27.1fps in Doom 3.

Big notebooks aren't designed for everyday mobile use, and the Zoostorm's battery lasted only two-and-



a-half hours in our test. However, if you need a powerful notebook for home use that won't cost the earth, this is ideal.

NOTEBOOK 2.16GHz Intel Core 2 Duo T7400 processor, 1GB RAM, 120GB hard disk, ATI Mobility Radeon X1600 graphics, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 17in widescreen LCD SUPPLIER sales@pcnextday.co.uk DETAILS www.pcnextday.co.uk PART CODE 3355-7701 Powerful in Windows; TV tuner Average keyboard and battery FULL REVIEW Jan 2007

BYTE SIZE

BE-EZ

LE 13 Street

★★★

£50 inc VAT



Be-ez's LE 13 Street is a grey notebook bag with a cyan interior. It's described as a mobile home for your Macbook, but we found it suited any notebook with up to a 13in screen.

The notebook is secured in the main compartment by a padded panel, fixed by Velcro. There is plenty of room in the rest of the bag for chargers, travel mice and magazines, plus pen and business card slots under a flap in the front. The flap is held closed with magnetic fasteners that won't attract fluff. The bag's strap is wide, but there's no shoulder padding so it isn't particularly comfortable to wear.

This is a decent, though expensive, notebook bag.

Chris Finnamore

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.be-ez.com

ZIP-LINQ ZIP-AUDIO-IP3

★★★★★

£12 inc VAT



Apple's iPod Video may look as if it has a standard 3.5mm mini A/V output socket, but its proprietary connections prevent a standard A/V cable working with the player. This means that you have to buy an Apple A/V cable to play back video, or a third-party alternative such as Zip-Linq's retractable ZIP-AUDIO-IP3.

The Zip-Linq cable is stored on a spool with a ratchet in the middle, so you can pull out as much length as you want and it will automatically lock. At one end is a standard 3.5mm A/V jack with iPod-compatible wiring, and at the other a composite video output and stereo RCA outputs. It's £3 cheaper than Apple's official cable and it delivers acceptable audio and video quality.

Chris Finnamore

SUPPLIER www.widget.co.uk
DETAILS www.ziplinq.com

BYTE SIZE

TECH AIR 5702

★★★★★
£44 inc VAT



Tech Air's 5702 carries any notebook up to 15.4in with lots of room spare. The front compartment has pockets for a mobile, MP3 player, passport and CDs. It has a zip round the edge, which you can undo to make the compartment bigger. Your notebook sits in a foam pouch in the bag's middle section. It's surrounded by air-filled pouches for protection.

The rear compartment is designed to take Tech Air's removable Skinnis. It ships with a waterproof Skinn perfect for toiletries, but you can buy one that takes your camera and accessories. It's a tough bag with lots of space and pockets, but the dashes of orange put us off a little.

David Ludlow

SUPPLIER www.ebuyer.com
DETAILS www.techair.co.uk

TRUST 4-in-1 Notebook Power Adapter

★★★★★
£40 inc VAT



Having a second power adaptor for your notebook is invaluable, especially if you use your computer both at work and at home. This power adaptor from Trust comes with six connectors that fitted all the notebooks in our office, except for one Samsung. A switch on the side lets you adjust it between 15V and 24V in seven steps.

There's also a standard 5V USB port that will power or charge any suitable USB device. There are eight adaptors for iPod, PSP, and a range of mobile phones, which could save you having to carry more than one charger. Official notebook replacement power adaptors cost around £30, so this is good value, particularly if you'll use it to power other devices too.

Seth Barton

SUPPLIER www.morecomputers.co.uk
DETAILS www.trust.com

ACER

TravelMate 8215WLMi

★★★★★
£1,547 inc VAT

Many notebook users need only run office applications and browse the web, hardly demanding tasks for the latest models. However, to run complex video-editing or photo-manipulation applications you'll need a powerful processor and a high-resolution display. Acer's TravelMate 8215WLMi has both.

The 15.4in screen's native resolution is a big 1,680x1,050 pixels, so it can display about 72 per cent more information than a standard 1,280x800 display. This could prove essential when running complex applications with multiple toolbars and windows. The screen has an anti-glare coating, so you can use it under well-lit conditions, but its own backlight isn't bright enough, and it lacks contrast as a result.

The 8215WLMi is specified for running the toughest of applications. It has 2GB of RAM, and an Intel Core 2 Duo T7200 processor that runs at a fast 2.0GHz. As you might expect, its performance was excellent in all our benchmarks and it's one of the fastest notebooks we've ever tested.

Acer has given this TravelMate a powerful 3D graphics processor, which has hardware acceleration for HD video playback. It ran our Doom 3 test at a playable frame rate and will handle the latest games, though not at their highest detail levels. If you later upgrade to Windows Vista, it should also be capable of running the 3D Aero interface.

Despite the TravelMate name, this notebook weighs three kilos. It's fine for occasional mobile use, but you'd only want to lug it around every day if you really needed all its computing power. If you do travel with it, you'll appreciate its



respectable battery life; it lasted three hours and 49 minutes in our light-usage test.

The keyboard has a slightly curved layout that is intended to reduce wrist ache from long typing sessions. Its layout isn't as exaggerated as Microsoft's split keyboard designs, so it should also suit non-touch typists. Though the touch pad is good, we had to raise Windows' mouse-pointer speed to compensate for the larger desktop. The buttons have a crisp click and there's a four-way scroll controller.

This is a slim notebook, but its base stayed cool throughout our application benchmarks. It feels sturdy, and the big 160GB hard disk has drop sensors to further protect it from damage. All the ports you'll ever need are arrayed around the notebook's edges, with switches to disable the wireless networking and Bluetooth transmitters. Acer also bundles a Bluetooth VoIP phone.

This is an impressive notebook for those that need maximum computing power in a slim chassis, but at this price it should have a brighter display with better contrast.

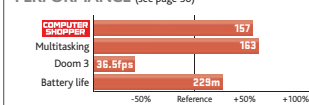
Seth Barton

SUMMARY

- ✓ Powerful in applications
- ✓ Decent battery life
- ✗ Dull display

NOTEBOOK 2.0GHz Intel Core 2 Duo T7200, 2GB RAM, 160GB hard disk, ATI Radeon Mobility X1600 graphics, DVD+/-RW +/-DL drive, 15.4in LCD screen, 3kg
PART CODE LX.TEH06.056
SUPPLIER www.savastore.com
DETAILS www.acer.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 56)



Also consider...

SAMSUNG Q35 Red

★★★★★
£949 inc VAT



The Samsung Q35 has everything you need from an ultra-portable notebook. The widescreen display is very impressive with bright whites and accurate colours, while the keyboard is a good size and the touch pad is very accurate. It weighs just 1.9kg and feels robust enough to take a few knocks. All the ports you're likely to want are squeezed around the tiny chassis.

Inside there's a DVD writer and a 100GB hard disk, providing plenty of storage for most needs. The Q35 has a fast dual-core processor and 1.25GB of RAM. Its integrated graphics chip uses 256MB of this, however, and the total can't be upgraded. It scored 146 overall in the *Shopper* application benchmarks.

The battery lasted for an impressive five hours and 39 minutes in our light-usage test, so you'll be able to



work for more than a morning or afternoon at a time. It's a great little notebook and would make an ideal travelling companion.

NOTEBOOK 1.83GHz Intel Core 2 Duo T5600 processor, 1.25GB RAM, 100GB hard disk, Intel GMA 950 graphics, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 12.1in widescreen LCD SUPPLIER Micro Anvika 020 7467 6050 DETAILS www.samsung.com/uk PART CODE NP-Q35T008/SUK ✓ Excellent battery life; good Windows performance ✓ Good display and keyboard FULL REVIEW Jan 2007

BYTE SIZE

Heartstopper

★★★★
£10 inc VAT



It's a quiet night in a hospital. The only people around are a couple of patients, a skeleton staff and the local sheriff (Robert Englund). There's just a small chance the corpse of a recently executed serial killer will be possessed by an immortal demon that rips out hearts until it finds a new body to inhabit, but otherwise it's a quiet night.

As silly as it sounds, *Heartstopper* is an effectively creepy chiller. Director Bob Keen keeps it simple, with plenty of gory death to ramp up the tension – as if an apparently invincible bad guy weren't enough – and pithy dialogue. There's also a key role for a Sony PSP. The disc includes a trailer and interviews with Keen and Englund.

Chris Miller

SUPPLIER www.choicesuk.com

JBL Radial

★★★★
£160 inc VAT



The Radial speaker dock has an attractive design that shows off an iPod's good looks. Its remote control is hard to fathom, with small buttons and vague symbols, but it works via RF so you don't have to point it at the unit. There's a line in, plus USB so you can connect it to your computer to synchronise and access music from iTunes.

The Radial isn't that loud. Its speakers sound a little too bright and trebly for our liking, but they are capable of a moderate amount of bass. Sound emanates from both the front and back of the unit, but it seems to come from one small spot, rather than filling the room.

For £160 it's not bad, but we prefer Logitech's AudioStation (see page 35).

Seth Barton

SUPPLIER www.amazon.co.uk
DETAILS www.jbl.com

CHOOSING A... Notebook Computer

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

PROCESSOR: 1.6GHz Intel Celeron M 420
MEMORY: 512MB DDR
HARD DISK: 60GB
STORAGE: DVD rewriter
GRAPHICS: Integrated (shares system memory)
SCREEN: 15.4in widescreen 1,280x800 LCD
EXTRAS: Wireless networking
CONNECTORS: Three USB2, memory card reader
SOFTWARE: Windows XP Home Edition
WEIGHT: 3kg
Recommended minimum in grey

1 The minimum specification of notebook we recommend, shown above in grey, is a good starting point when working out your ideal system. This is an average notebook that should cost around £600. It is not particularly powerful or, at 3kg, particularly portable.

2 Dual-core processors, such as Intel's Core Duo range, can be much faster at many tough tasks. This is dependent on software support, but a lot of applications have now been optimised. Dual-core processors are widely available and often cost only a little more than their single-core equivalents.

3 Most notebooks come with 15.4in 1,280x800 widescreen displays, which are great for watching DVDs or TV. If you want a notebook for use around the home, especially for entertainment purposes, it's worth considering one with a larger 17in display. This will also have a higher native resolution of at least 1,440x900, giving you a bigger desktop. This makes it far easier to use complex applications, such as photo- or video-editing software.

4 A modem, 10/100 Ethernet port and wireless 802.11b/g networking (WiFi) should be fitted as standard, but there are also some other ports and connectors that you might want. FireWire (IEEE 1394) is common and useful for digital video enthusiasts. Bluetooth is handy for connecting to a mobile phone, but it's usually fitted only to more expensive business notebooks. Memory card readers are pretty much standard, but check that your camera or MP3 player's format is supported.

5 If portability is your main priority, look for notebooks with 12.1in displays.

Spending around £1,000 will get you an ultra-portable notebook that weighs under 2kg. Most of these notebooks are just as powerful as their larger counterparts, though some use slower, ultra-low voltage (ULV) processors to further increase battery life.

6 Some ultra-portables can attach to an optional docking station, which incorporates drives, ports and power, when you get home to your desk. It's the best of both worlds, but tends to be expensive. Others have separate DVD drives to help keep size and weight to a minimum.

7 If you're not swayed by ultra-portable chic, you can get a lot more for your money. Entertainment notebooks pile on the features but still keep the price under £1,200. You should expect a 17in widescreen display, hybrid TV tuner, Windows XP Media Center Edition and a remote control.

8 There are features you can add to a notebook without increasing the weight or reducing battery life. A 120GB or 160GB hard disk will give you much more storage space, while 1GB of RAM will help you speed through bigger tasks. DVD rewriter drives are standard and will allow you to burn CDs and DVDs on your notebook.

9 Dedicated graphics let you play modern 3D games and are increasingly common on all but the cheapest or lightest notebooks. Look for ATI Radeon Mobility X1600 or Nvidia GeForce Go 7600 as a minimum for getting smooth frame rates on the latest titles. Many notebooks use integrated graphics, which are fine for all other purposes, but use up system memory.

10 Once you're happy with your specification, start to shortlist some models you can afford. Check the weight, display size and battery life of each of them. If these are not acceptable, you need to reconsider your priorities and which features you really need.

